



Martin O'Malley, Governor  
Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor

State Highway  
Administration

John D. Porcari, Secretary  
Neil J. Pedersen, Administrator

Maryland Department of Transportation

April 17, 2009

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen  
United States Congress  
House of Representatives  
Suite 507  
51 Monroe Street  
Rockville MD 20850

Dear ~~Congressman Van Hollen:~~ *Chris*

Thank you for your letter regarding bicycle and pedestrian accommodations included in our proposed improvements for the intersections near the Bethesda National Naval Medical Center. These improvements are proposed to mitigate the increased traffic expected from the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process. It is my pleasure to respond to your concern.

The State Highway Administration (SHA) appreciates your efforts to secure funding for transportation projects that will mitigate BRAC-related traffic. The additional \$3 million recently appropriated by Congress, along with the \$31.3 million budgeted in Maryland's Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP), will help fund much-needed intersection improvements near the future Walter Reed Military Medical Center. Additional funding will be needed to complete all of the proposed improvements for the four intersections.

The SHA is committed to make every effort to accommodate all travelers, including pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and drivers of passenger and commercial vehicles. The reconstruction of all four of the intersections will include the installation of both Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS) and Countdown Pedestrian Signals (CPS), as well as the reconstruction of pedestrian ramps to ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The APS devices emit a periodic clicking sound that helps visually impaired individuals to locate and navigate crosswalks. The CPS devices display the remaining seconds that a pedestrian has, in which to finish crossing the road. All existing sidewalks will be maintained, and all that are currently less than five feet wide will be widened to at least five feet.

My telephone number/toll-free number is 410-545-0400 or 1-800-206-0770

Maryland Relay Service for Impaired Hearing or Speech: 1.800.735.2258 Statewide Toll Free

Street Address: 707 North Calvert Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21202 • Phone: 410.545.0300 • [www.marylandroads.com](http://www.marylandroads.com)

The right-turn channelization island on the southeast corner of MD 355 (Rockville Pike) and Cedar Lane does not comply with our current standards. The existing configuration does not align the crosswalk to the island as it does on the southwest corner, where pedestrians have a refuge area in which to change between the signal-controlled crossing and the free-flow crossing. The current design proposes to remove the right-turn channelization island on the southeast corner and to convert this pedestrian movement into a fully signal-controlled crossing. While it is anticipated that right turns on red will be permitted, we are in the process of reviewing the turning radii at each intersection to see if they can be reduced. This could simultaneously reduce the crossing distance as well as the speeds of motorists who are performing right turns.

Our statewide standard defines the pedestrian crossing speed as three and one-half feet per second, which was recently reduced from four feet per second. This speed, which is factored into our calculations for signal timing, allots the time necessary for a pedestrian to cross the intersection. All impacted signals will be required to abide by this standard. A six-foot-wide, monolithic concrete median is also being constructed, which will provide a refuge for pedestrians who are unable to complete their crossing.

Accommodations for cyclists are also included in the proposed improvements. The existing bike path that runs along the west side of MD 355 on the National Institute of Health (NIH) property will also be maintained. Where the existing path is eight feet or less in width, it will be widened to 10 feet. An existing path runs along the north side of Cedar Lane. All of the widening in this area is on the south side of Cedar Lane; thus that path will not be impacted.

The SHA is aware of Montgomery County's Master Plan and the desire for a multiuse path between MD 355 and MD 187 (Old Georgetown Road) and improvements and additional connectivity of the Trolley Trail. Our policy is to construct Master Plan amenities, such as multiuse paths, if the affected property owners are willing to sell or donate the required right-of-way. Widening and/or constructing portions of the Trolley Trail would require right-of-way from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The NIH has expressed to us that it does not support these intersection improvements or any impacts to its property. At NIH's request, we are studying realignments to reduce impacts to NIH property. One of those alignment shifts is at the intersection of MD 187 and Cedar Lane. The shift places all of the proposed widening on the west side of MD 187, with no widening on the east side. With this shift, future widening of the trail is not compromised. If NIH supports the trail and the additional right-of-way impacts, SHA will consider constructing it. To date, that is not the case. Cost estimates for these improvements exceed available funding. Constructing the multi-use path along Cedar Lane would increase the construction and right-of-way cost, perhaps to the point where the no-build alternate may be the only viable option.

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen  
Page Three

The cost and right-of-way impacts of the proposed improvements, without wider outside lanes, are already considerable. We did investigate what the impacts would be if we widened the roadway to accommodate additional BRAC-related traffic and cyclists. Given the purpose and need of these projects, to mitigate BRAC traffic and not to address long-term corridor issues, we concluded that the impacts would be too costly. The SHA does, however, recognize the need to accommodate cyclists, as much as feasibly possible, within the constraints we have. We are committed to reduce the lane widths to ten feet, given that there is such a large contingency of cyclists. This reduction will allow a wider outside lane to provide limited accommodations for on-road cyclists. This lane reduction will only occur within the limits of work for each intersection.

It is SHA's responsibility and desire that all types of traveler use our facilities safely and effectively. It is a constant challenge to meet the needs of all stakeholders; while exercising prudence in our spending. With limited funding available for BRAC-related improvements, decisions were made to at least maintain all existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities and to enhance them where impacts and costs were minimal.

Thank you again for your letter and your support in securing funds for these BRAC-related intersection improvements. If we may be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to call me or Ms. Barbara L. Solberg, Assistant Chief, Highway Design Division, SHA at 410-545-8830, toll-free 888-228-5003 or via email at [bsolberg@sha.state.md.us](mailto:bsolberg@sha.state.md.us).

Sincerely,



Neil J. Pedersen  
Administrator

cc: Mr. Darrell B. Mobley, District Engineer, SHA  
Ms. Barbara Solberg, Assistant Division Chief, Highway Design Division, SHA